

Ninety Billion Rules in the West

This article will be more directed to monastics rather than to lay people. A number of friends asked me to provide them with this information, but I needed some time and the right opportunity to fulfil that request appropriately.

Between 8th of March and 30th of June I travelled in largely non-Buddhist areas or areas where strict monks (which loosely said would be monks who do their best to follow all of the over ninety billion rules of *Vinaya Piṭaka*) have never been to. I visited Malaysia, Australia (Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Perth), Czech Republic, Germany, UK, France, and Sweden. During those travels met different people from different backgrounds of life, and in rare instances I visited a Theravāda monastery. Throughout that time there was not a single occasion, when I would break (transgress) a single rule out of those over ninety billion rules prescribed to monks by the Code of Discipline (*Vinaya Piṭaka*) and commonly believed to be so decided by the Buddha Himself. Although there were occasions when I would forget to follow a certain rule, there was never a case when I would decide to "suspend a rule" or simply intentionally ignore it. All of the monastic rules, as far as I am aware of them, were immaculately followed in any environment and society that I visited.

Of course, this had numerous advantages, and numerous disadvantages as well. The disadvantages that caused misunderstanding, or even certain displeasure, were caused by mistakes that I myself committed (out of my lack of experience in the dungeon). Of course, most the of problems were caused by my greed, hatred, and ignorance. All of the difficulties were, fortunately, only temporary, and I learned how to solve those issues better next time. In other words, all of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* rules were not only followed immaculately, but with a sufficient experience, they could be followed with satisfaction and happiness on both sides. I am not aware of a single place where I would not be welcome again. In all places that I left from I was invited to come again in the future. This is to stand as a proof that following the rules of *Vinaya Piṭaka* is possible even in the most non-Buddhist places in the western "advanced countries".

First I will have to explain what is the "over ninety billion rules" and then why should they all be followed. The number of rules is given in *Visuddhimagga – Sīlaniddesa*:

<i>Visuddhimagga</i> , the Commentary ¹	Translation by monk Saraṇa
" <i>Nava koṭṭisahassāni</i> ,	"Nine thousand <i>ten-millions</i> ² (i.e. 90 000 000 000),

¹ *Visuddhimagga – 1. Sīlaniddeso – Paṭhamasīlapañcaka*.

² Ven. Ñāṇamoli in the footnote no.35, on the page 46 of his *Path of Purification* suggests, that *koṭṭi* might mean a million, hundred thousand, or ten thousand. However, in Sinhalese language *koṭṭi* is used exclusively for ten millions, and the Burmese version "kaḍe" (ကဉ္စ) is also used exclusively for ten million. Most importantly, however, both Burmese (in the 23 volume large "Pāli-Burmese Dictionary", vol.6, p.325) and Sinhalese (in "*Pāli-Sinhalese Dictionary*" by Śrī Laṅkā Vidyodaya Viśva Vidyālaya, 1965; p.244) traditions translate *koṭṭi* as ten millions. PTS mentions "approximately the figure a hundred thousand" and "10 million". According to ven. Ñāṇamoli, *nava koṭṭisahassāni*, nine

<i>asītisatakotiyo;</i>	Eighty (and) a hundred ten-millions (i.e. 1 800 000 000)
<i>Paññāsasatasahassāni</i>	Fifty hundred-thousands (i.e. 5 000 000)
<i>chattiṃsā ca punāpare.</i>	And finally thirty-six (thousand). (i.e. 36 000)
<i>"Ete saṃvaravinayā, sambuddhena pakāsītā;</i>	"Such are the regulations of restraint, proclaimed by the rightly Awakened One,
<i>Peyyālamukhena niddiṭṭhā, sikkhā vinayaṣaṃvare"ti.</i>	Listed in matrices (are) the trainings of restraint's regulation.

Together there are "exactly" 91 805 036 000 rules, a good substitution for a monk's phone number. You can catch a monk by this number, that is for sure.

So far I haven't been successful in finding out how the monks reached this number. Regardless how much the precepts are, they are much more than the famous 227 rules (which are just the most famous) recited every full-moon and new-moon day in *Theravāda* monasteries. All of them should be followed without fail:

thousand million is then followed by *asītisatakotiyo*, i.e. "a hundred and eighty millions", which makes it 918 000 000. In the Burmese and Sinhalese understanding, it would be a zero more – 9 180 000 000. Ven. Ñāṇamoli translated "*asītisatakotiyo*" as hundred; and eighty millions then as well" (180 000 000) which is identical with the Burmese translation of ven. Ashin Nandamālā, the newest available today, from 2012. Right after that ven. Ñāṇamoli follows in the same way, translating *paññāsasatasahassāni* as "fifty plus a hundred thousand" (150 000), although in Burmese it is translated as "fifty hundred-thousands" (5 000 000). The best way to show the right way of understanding these numbers is to look at a place where the numbers are given gradually from small to big: "*Dasasataṃ sahaṣaṃ dasasahassam satasahassam dasasatasahassam koṭi pakoti koṭippakoti nahutaṃ ninnahutaṃ akkhobhīni bindu abbudaṃ nirabbudaṃ ahaṃ ababaṃ aṭaṭaṃ sogandhikaṃ uppalaṃ kumudaṃ puṇḍarikaṃ padumaṃ kathānaṃ mahākathānaṃ asaṅkhyeyyānaṃ vasena asaṅkhiyā saṅkhārahitā dhammarājāno atītā vigatā niruddhā abbatthaṃ gatāti adhippāyo.*" This is the list of numbers given from *dasa* "ten" until *asaṅkhyeyya* ("the uncountable"). We can see, that it goes in ascending order, it is not jumbled: (1) *dasa* (ten), (2) *sataṃ* (hundred), (3) *sahaṣaṃ* (thousand), (4) *dasasahassam* (ten thousand), (5) *satasahassam* (hundred thousand), (6) *dasasatasahassam* (ten hundred-thousand, i.e. a million – and *not* hundred and ten thousand), (7) *koṭi* (ten-million). See how it goes just by a single zero upward, so there can be no doubt about the meaning. According to the scripture *Gandhavaṃsa*, the *Apadāna* Commentary (1. *Buddhavaggo* – 1. *Buddhaapadānavaṇṇanā*) where this list of ascending numbers is to be found was also authored by the ven. Buddhaghosa, the famous author of *Visuddhimagga*.

In that case, we have a discrepancy in the Burmese translation – why *asītisatakotiyo* would take the first number *asīti* (eighty) as connected to the word *kotiyo* (ten-million) and not to the word *sata* (hundred), deciding it to be 1 800 millions instead of 80 000 millions – and then completely changing the way of translating in *paññāsasatasahassāni*, taking *paññāsa* (fifty) as connected to *sata* (hundred) and not to *sahassāni* (thousands), deciding it to be 5 000 000 instead of 150 000? I suppose this is because of the ambiguity of numbers in Pāli language. The first case had to be decided "against the rules" in order to make it logically correct (i.e. "90 and 80 billions" would not be a nice representation of a number, whereas "90 billions and 1.8 billions" would); the second case then followed the common rules of Pāli grammar, and well represented the number - fifty hundred-thousand plus thirty-six thousand (5 036 000). Ven. Ñāṇamoli's "fifty plus a hundred thousand; And thirty-six again" doesn't make much sense, because it becomes a mathematical question, rather than a presentation of a number: 150 000 + 36 000 – count it up yourself.

<i>Visuddhimagga – Sīlasamkilesavodānaṃ</i>	Translation by ven. Ñāṇamoli ³
<i>Apica dussīlo puggalo dussīyahetu amanāpo hoti devamanussānaṃ,</i>	Furthermore, on account of his unvirtuousness an unvirtuous person is displeasing to deities and humang beings,
<i>ananusāsaniyo sabrahmacārīnaṃ,</i>	Is uninstrutable by his fellows in the life of purity,
<i>dukkhito dussīlyagarahāsu,</i>	Suffers when unvirtuousness is censured,
<i>vippaṭisārī sīlavataṃ pasamsāsu,</i>	And is remorseful when the virtuous are praised.
<i>tāya ca pana dussīyatāya sānasāṭako viya dubbanno hoti.</i>	Owing to that unvirtuousness he is as ugly as hemp cloth.
<i>Ye kho panassa diṭṭhānugatiṃ āpajjanti, tesam dīgharattaṃ apāyadukkhāvaḥanato dukkhasamphasso.</i>	Contact with him is painful because those who fall in with his views are brought to long-lasting suffering in the states of loss.
<i>Yesam deyyadhammaṃ paṭiggaṇhāti, tesam namahapphalakaraṇato appaggho.</i>	He is worthless because he causes no great fruit [to accrue] to those who give him gifts.
<i>Anekavassagaṇikagūthakūpo viya dubbisodhano.</i>	He is as hard to purify as a cesspit many years old.
<i>Chavālātamiva ubhato paribāhiro.</i>	He is like a log from a pyre (see Iti. 99); for he is outside both [recluship and the lay state].
<i>Bhikkhubhāvaṃ paṭijānantopi abhikkhuyeva gogaṇaṃ anubandhagadrabho viya.</i>	Though claiming the bhikkhu state he is no bhikkhu, so he is like a donkey following a herd of cattle.
<i>Satatubbiggo sabbaverikapuriso viya.</i>	He is always nervous, like a man who is everyone's enemy.
<i>Asamvāsāraho matakalevaram viya.</i>	He is as unfit to live with as a dead carcass.
<i>Sutādiguṇayuttopi sabrahmacārīnaṃ apūjāraho susānaggi viya brāhmaṇānaṃ.</i>	Though he may have the qualities of learning, etc., he is an unfit for the homage of his fellows in the life of purity as a charnel/ground fire is for that of brahmans.
<i>Abhabbo visesādhigame andho viya rūpadassane.</i>	He is as incapable of reaching the distinction of attainment as a blind man is of seeing a visible object.
<i>Nirāso saddhamme caṇḍālakumārako viya rajje.</i>	He is as careless of the Good Law as a guttersnipe is of a kingdom.
<i>Sukhitosmīti maññaṃānapi dukkhitova aggikkhandhapariyāye vuttadukkhabhāgitāya.</i>	Though he fancies he is happy, yet he suffers because he reaps suffering as told in the Discourse on the Mass of Fire. (A.iv, 128-34).

So, according to Visuddhimagga it is not a wonderful thing if a monk is not scrupulous and observing all the *Vinaya* rules – because the "virtue" (*sīla*) for monks is given by the *Vinaya* rules, not by anything else. Note however, that unintentional breaking of precepts is not only within the strictest observance, but it can happen even the Arahants, the fully Enlightened monks. Therefore, by *sīla* (virtue) is here understood as the intention to follow the declared restrained according to one's knowledge, and does not include unintentional or unknown (not-yet-learned) rules. The transgression of rules unintentionally or through ignorance is still a matter to be confessed

³ "Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)", by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, [year of publication is not mentioned, but the introduction of Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu contains "May, 1956"]; pp.53-54.

to a fellow monk(s), but it says nothing about the monk's "virtue". A monk is virtuous as soon as he follows all the rules he knows to the best of his knowledge.

Now of course, even if a monk had to be born in hell for breaking a small precept, he will break them anyway if he wants. Such is the nature of human, and there is nothing we can do with that. Well then, who is the monk who follows all the rules, and how to recognize them? I believe that there are only four such kinds of monks:

1. Those who have already attained one of the four levels of Enlightenment – they have unshakeable faith in the Buddha, hence they will follow His rules even at the cost of their life.⁴

2. Those who expect to become Enlightened as soon as possible, hopefully the next minute or second – these are aware of the fact, that if their observance is not complete, they will not be able to attain Enlightenment.⁵

3. Those who are seriously afraid of rebirth in hell if they do not follow the rules diligently. – These are usually monks who memorized so many Pāli texts that they simply can't afford ignoring the Buddha's warnings.

4. Those who have strong faith in the Buddha – either because they fear they will die soon and try to make sure a good birth after death, or because they have experienced or heard something that changed their previous attitudes. Unfortunately, these cases of enthusiastic virtue are *usually* temporary.

The observance of all other monks will be either weak or not thorough.

I will share with you what I learned and experienced, so that if you decide to live as a "strict monk", you can avoid unnecessary difficulties.

Let's first list the issues that will be discussed:

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|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Money | 4. Robes and Clothing | 7. Women | 10. Confession of |
| 2. Eating and Drinking | 5. Accommodation | 8. Teaching Dhamma | transgressions |
| 3. Travelling | 6. Bhikkhunīs | 9. Sight-Seeing | |

⁴ Obviously, most of monks who "attained Enlightenment" do not agree with this – as soon as they intentionally break a rule of *Vinaya Piṭaka*. Nevertheless, this is a generally accepted "fact" in Myanmar, based on the original word of the Buddha, included in the most ancient strata of Pāli scriptures. Three examples are coming from three different Pāli sources: (1) *Āṅguttara Nikāya 8.1.2.9. Pahārāda Sutta*, (2) *Udānapāli 5.5. Upasatha Sutta*, and (3) *Vinaya Piṭaka - Cūlavagga – Pātimokkhaṭṭhapanakkhandhakaṃ - 3. Imasmimḍhammavinayeattṭhacchariyaṃ*. They mention that the Buddha's disciples (explained by the related Sub-Commentary (*Ṭīkā*) as Stream-Enterers and higher) will never break a single rule (*sikkhāpada*) that had been declared by Him: "*Seyyathāpi, pahārāda, mahāsamuddo tṭhitadhammo velaṃ nātivattati; evamevaṃ kho, pahārāda, yaṃ mayā sāvakānaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ paññattaṃ taṃ mama sāvakā jīvita hetupi nātikkamanti.*" = "Just as the great ocean, Pahārāda, is stable and does not overflow its boundaries, so too, Pahārāda, whatever training rule I have prescribed for my disciples, they will not transgress it even for life's sake." (Tr. by monk Saraṇa with help of Bhikkhu Bodhi's "*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya*", Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2012; p.1143.)

⁵ The Buddha is believed to proclaim that a monk who (intentionally) breaks a Vinaya rule, cannot attain Enlightenment. Of course, as soon as he confesses that rule to a fellow monk, or purifies it by other ways described by the scriptures, it is possible to attain Enlightenment any time right after the purification. Unfortunately, I have not been able to discover the exact reference. I however remember it was somewhere in *Vinaya Piṭaka – Cūlavagga pāli...*

1. Money

Not touching, accepting, keeping, and using money – this is one of the most important rules for a strict monk. There are monks who take this rule as decisive when distinguishing a good monk from a bad monk. It is however the kind of rule which is perhaps most difficult to follow in the West.

It is therefore unavoidable, that a monk travels abroad only when he is invited, that means invited together with transport, food, accommodation, medical care, and anything else that he might possibly need to stay healthy until his return. If the invitation doesn't contain these points, then it makes no sense for the monk to go abroad and suffer from walking always on foot, hunger, sleeping under a bridge, and possibly dying of a sickness because of no support for medical care. Of course, in these cases monks break the rules, take a credit card, take money and do whatever they want. A monk who has faith in the Buddha will not take this as an option. If a monk doesn't get complete invitation, he should decrease his greed, observe his greed, analyze his greed, fight with his greed, suppress his greed, and destroy and eliminate his greed until he becomes an *Anāgāmi* or an *Arahant*. This is what should be done if a monk wants to travel abroad but was not invited entirely.

When a monk is fully invited, the trip abroad is so comfortable – because the lay people expect to donate to the monk transport, food, accommodation, medical care, and anything else needed – there is no worry from any side, and the monk just needs to curb his desires which are exceeding "necessity". It is then the choice of the monk whether he accepts extra suggestions, such as sightseeing, etc. The *Vinaya* rules should however be followed strictly and the public opinion should be always considered (e.g. monk is not supposed to ride in roller-coaster, even if invited. Once I was criticised for "considering public opinion", but that's because the person was not aware of the detrimental consequences (to monks in general and to Buddhism) that might follow if public opinion is not taken seriously.)

There are two ways how a monk can accept an invitation for a trip and not use money:

A) When the trip is financed by those very people who invited the monk.

B) When the trip is financed by the monk's supporter(s) elsewhere, who send money to those who invited the monk.

I believe that A) is self explanatory and doesn't need any further comment. The B) is however problematic and needs explanation.

My journeys throughout Australia, namely Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, and Perth – all were supported in the A) way, i.e. entirely financed by those who invited me. My travelling in Europe, however, was often sponsored by the Australians. I found it very auspicious that I could get to such places in Europe where I would not get otherwise, and at the same time I knew that the support for the European "touring" was abundant and readily available. So, instead of just going to Czech Republic – which was the former plan, my European visit extended also to Germany, UK, France, and Sweden. There are three facets of the problem: a) the transport to the different places, b) the food, accommodation, transport etc. in those places, c) the organization of all the costs.

As for a) the transport to all the different places was organized by a single person, which was a serious failure, a truly bad mistake. Unlike in Australia, where each person in each city organized the invitation themselves, in Europe all my touring was organized by a single person – which created such a large burden for that person, that the person will remember it their whole life. On one hand this was more comfortable, because only that one person received the financial resources and then handled them as a single person, thus avoiding a lot of confusion. On the other hand, the burden of the stress and problem-solving was seriously overwhelming. A portion of the money had to go to three different people anyway, who suggested that with additional financial support they can take care of me better. I learned from this never ever to accept invitation which involves other person's organization or other person's financial support. The best invitations where those fully supported, and the worst were those supported from external source.

2. Eating and Drinking

To make my touring more comfortable, I decided to eat only one time a day, in the morning, by which I would avoid unnecessary need for the "food ritual" in the middle of a trip or a project. This was very helpful, because monk's eating usually takes more preparation (usually willingly undertaken by the host) than that of a lay person. When we travelled, it was most comfortable just for me to wait those 20-30 minutes until my host(s) have their meal, and then just continue. Meal for me would be in the morning, 8-9 AM. This wasn't that much important in Australia, because in Australia, if the hosts decided that 11 AM is the only option, it was very comfortable anyway (and the time was saved in the morning). That is because in Australia I was supported by Buddhists, and so there was no fuss about what to eat, how to eat, where, with what, in what circumstance. Everything went smoothly. The problems started in Europe, when the person was not a Buddhist, or when the person was not native to the country. At that moment the time was running, and the person didn't know what to buy, where to go, in what circumstance to offer food, how to offer it, what to do with the left-overs, etc. etc. A serious bundle of stress and problems, throughout the spectrum of different places and hosts – but with the same features:

- a) not a Buddhist or not native to the country,
- b) using financial support from external source,
- c) not experienced in offering a meal to a monk,
- d) offering the meal at noon.

When all these four were together, the meal-offering was one great experience of stress and suffering. The most unpleasant feature of these situations was, that it was then me, who had to search which restaurant or place to go to eat, and what to eat. This made all the issue even worse, because – as *Vinaya* allows monks to choose whatever *Vinaya*-proper they wish when their helper/steward has financial resources intended just for the monk – I simply chose that what I liked and preferred most, rather than what would be healthy or needed. I could stay without food for three days, or even seven days, or even more – but I didn't. Instead, I expected to fill my stomach with excellent food. The result? There were times when we would spend an hour just finding the restaurant that I thought was best and then, not finding it, going elsewhere anyway. Or eating food that I didn't appreciate at all, because I wasn't skilled in choosing it. Or suggesting too much

food for too much money, and then eating just quarter or third of the purchased amount. (The host then decided that the rest of the food is best to be thrown in a waste-bin nearby.)

So again, the only appropriate way of eating food is eating the food that the person who invited me will purchase themselves as their own donation for me. The donated food was always the best, the food purchased from external resources, apart from rare exceptions, was the worst.

As for *Vinaya* rule, two that I was most careful about were:

1. Always check fruit, if fruit is complete and with seeds, ask the donor to "prepare" them. Monks are prohibited to ask the donor to "cut" them, so "this fruit is not prepared, I can eat it only if it is prepared" is the only thing a monk can tell. If there is another fruit that is already cut in half or little pieces, the monk can say "look at this fruit, this one is prepared, that one is not prepared". The lay person will make sure they understood: "You mean I should cut this one?" The monk then can be silent or repeat: "if you prepare it, I can accept it." The explanation at that moment can be given, but it might be too much time consuming, so it can be postponed for a later time. The donor would be just explained, that seeds were believed to contain life, by certain people during the Buddha's time in India, and to avoid their resentment and distrust of monks, monks are not allowed to destroy seeds. At the same time, because the Buddha didn't teach about life in plants, and also to make the fruit donation easy for the lay people, it is possible for a monk to eat fruits that are either damaged by fire, or damaged by knife, or damaged by nail, or seed-less, or with the seed removed.

2. Sometimes people will try to offer a juice or food in a vessel which is made of gold or silver. This should be noticed on time and politely requested to receive it in a vessel without gold or silver. I know nothing about gold and silver, nor about golden coloring etc., so I requested a different vessel even if it was just a thin border of the glass that was slightly painted in gold-like yellow.

3. Offering by hands. If the monk is a *Theravāda* monk, he must have all food and drinks (except water and tooth-picks) "offered" (i.e. given) by hands of the donor, either in the monk's own hands, or inside the bowl, or on a mat/cloth/tray/table that the monk is just touching. I had to be very mindful about juices, because often times the lay people would prepare a juice somewhere, and I had to ask them who was that juice for. When they replied it was for me, I explained that I could drink it only if it was given into my hands. Then they picked the glass of juice and gave it directly in my hands. Sometimes I forgot whether it was already given to my hands, so the host then was amazed why I asked them again to offer it again.

3. Travelling

I distinguish four kinds of travelling: a) by airplane, b) by car, c) by train/boat, d) by bus, e) on foot. Because buses are sometimes overcrowded (much more than trains), I follow the advice of my preceptor, Sayadaw U Paññāvaṃsa, that it is better not to travel by buses. Travelling on foot in the West is nice if it is once at a time, but if I have scheduled teachings and courses as tightly as possible, I won't come on time if I go on foot. Also, it is possible to travel by psychic powers, but so far I haven't attain them.

Travelling by airplane is the best kind of travel for monks, because they can go alone and do not need money for it. The supporters just sent me the e-ticket by e-mail, and off I go. If there is a problem on the way, (in most cases) it would be fatal. The disadvantage is, that in the eyes of Europeans, travel by airplane

is too costly (I never noticed such attitude in Australia.) So, if the host invites the monk to come by airplane, then it is most auspicious. Of course, it is necessary that each person who invites the monk themselves arrange the flight ticket – if only one person is responsible for all flight ticket throughout the monk's tour, it will create immense suffering to both sides. Luggage is very serious issue, if the monk has a large luggage and the host didn't arrange such flight ticket (airlines) where the necessary weight would be allowed. The monk must ask the host whether a luggage is allowed and be precise about the needed kg (some airlines allow max. 23 kg, some allow 30 kg, some allow only 20 kg). Somehow we had a misunderstanding regarding my luggage with a person who arranged certain flight tickets for me, and that caused days and weeks of stress and worries. Sometimes excess luggage can be sent by post to a country (e.g. Singapore or Australia) where there are people who could take it to Myanmar (sending packages by post directly to Myanmar is still not recommended). Another problem that arose several times was with food. When I was flying from Perth to Czech Republic, on the way I stopped in Dubai – and it was only the Dubai transit where I could take meal according to Vinaya, because my arrival to Czech Republic was too late for lunch. Of course, there is meal served on the airplane –and imagine popping out an alms-bowl and eating with crossed legs on the tight airplane seat... And for the monks who don't need to get slim and wretched as soon as possible, the amount of the food on airplane might not suffice as their one meal in a day (but if the monk once eats that, he is no more allowed to have a second meal during the day, so choose yourself). In these cases it is only *kamma* that decides the fate of the monk's meal. In Perth my thoughtful supporters suggested to an unknown lady at the Perth airport, that she would take money from them and then in Dubai she would purchase whatever meal I'd like. She refused, saying that she wanted to pay it all by herself. I don't know about her beliefs or habits, but me and my supporters were pretty surprised to hear that. And indeed, in Dubai we left from the airplane and she offered me a delicious meal.

Another case was on the way from Sweden to Myanmar. Just like in the previous case, the only good time for meal (in the framework of *Vinaya*) was during the waiting time, in Bangkok. Fortunately, the two flights were separated, so I was not bound to the airport lounges. Here the problem was coupled with luggage-weight worry. I worried that my luggage might not be accepted for the other flight, and I thought I could have somebody (anybody) to give them my excess luggage and have that brought to Myanmar later, by somebody else. I simply contacted my "whole-life supporters" about the situation, and they then themselves arranged a person who stayed in Bangkok to come to see me at the airport and help me with my luggage. My supporters wanted to send the person money to offer me meal. The Burmese lady refused receiving any money and herself came with her family to see me, offered me a delicious meal, and helped me with my luggage. All went utmost smoothly. (I also learned that in Bangkok's Suvarna Bhumi airport check-in lines and passport checks etc. are immensely long - I suppose "ordinary" people wait altogether 1-2 hours in several queues - so next time I will be more time-cautious. This time I was miraculously lucky to "catch" the airplane.)

Travelling by car is also very comfortable, because there is a driver in the car (monks are not allowed to drive cars – not because of a *Vinaya* rule, but because it would make them too similar to lay people. Also note, that if a monk drives a car, he would need to use money to pay the diverse highway fees etc.) The driver then simply takes the responsibility to bring the monk to the destination, so the monk again doesn't need to care about money (supporters can give the driver financial resources just in case something was needed). So far I never had a problem going by car. The difficulty comes when the car-transport is not available to the host, but the host (or the monk) believe that renting a car would be ideal solution for transport. This of course can turn into very high expenditures in countries such as UK, much higher than the ostentatious British train. In Sweden it is similar, but there I didn't repeat my mistake for the second time.

Although monk "doesn't have" money, monk is responsible for using them in the most conscientious way possible. So, although it might be alright to use them for comfortable sojourn, they certainly should not be wasted without use.

Next is train and boat. Train and boat are similar in the fact that if they crash, the monk will need to use money or ask people for help (which is not allowed if the help includes financial support). I have the experience of travelling by train and boat with a supporter or a helper, and that was always fantastic. It however shouldn't surprise me (but it did, because I never saw or heard of that when invited anywhere in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, or Thailand) if the host, the person who themselves invited me to their place, use the monk's financial resources also for their own ticket. To avoid such surprises it is necessary to accept only invitations which are complete, entirely donated by the person who invited the monk, without use of any external support.

4. Robes and Clothing

Since the very beginning I decided to keep only three robes (the under-robe, upper-robe, and the double-robe) to avoid unnecessary confusion regarding the robes, and what to wear when etc. etc. The problem there is, that (according to the Burmese understanding) the three-robe wearer must follow the rules related to guarding the robes, rules that do not apply to those who have more than three robes. It makes sense to me – those who have more than three robes, if they loose one or two, they will simply use the other robes. For the monk who has only three – and is abroad, in a non-Buddhist country – if he looses a robe, he will have only two. If he loses two robes, he will have only one. And tell me of a monk who walks out of the monastery in one robe only ... So the three robes must be guarded well, and there is a number of *Vinaya* rules to help in that. It happened to me that I was sleeping in a tent right next to a luxurious villa (where I was just conducting a meditation course), and one night I went to sleep late at night, and forgot to take my double robe with me into the tent. In the morning I woke up after dawn – and boom, I had an offence. Monk is not allowed to pass a dawn without any of the three robes at hand or inside the room/house he slept in. And the tent had a different roof than the villa, so it was different dwelling, and even the entrance to the villa was further than a hand-reach (*hatthapāsa*) of mine, who stayed in the tent.



The tent's corner was perhaps a *hatthapāsa* from the door, but me sleeping inside was not.

The difficulty for the strictest monks in the West is with temperature. Especially when the temperature is between -3° to 15° Celsius, the monk coming from tropical regions might find that quite challenging. No shoes, no cap, no hat, no extra clothes, nothing. Just the under-robe and upper-robe, and possibly the double-robe around the neck or over the upper-robe.. oh yes, and a belt around the waist, right? My double-

robe is coming from Myanmar, and double-robos of Myanmar are of very poor quality. During the last five years I have been sewing my double-robe so much, that it's size shrunk and it is no more sufficient for the double-shouldered Burmese "grandma" clothing style (which incorporates rolling of the borders and takes some amount of the cloth for the neck as well). I was lucky that most of the times I was transported by a car, so the few seconds outside were not a problem. But this was April-May. I suppose I will need a good double-robe next year, if I visit Europe in February. I also think about doing some fire-kasina practice, concentrating on the element of fire. This is also a powerful meditation technique - described in my beloved *Visuddhimagga* - that can help the yogi create internal heat even by mind. (The practice is *not* same as "tummo" in Tibetan Buddhism.)

Already since the beginning of my touring I decided to travel without shoes. The rules of *Vinaya* prescribe, that those monks who travel without shoes should wash their feet before entering a building, esp. if it is a monastic building. I found this very useful, because then I avoid blame that I am begriming my host's precious carpet or floor. I would take a cup of water, and pouring the water over my feet I would rub the feet with my hand in all possibly dirty places, so that my feet were as clean as possible. Then I would use a towel or whatever I was given to dry them. This was fine when entering a family house, but not that appreciated if it was an apartment inside a block-of-flats. Some block-of-flats, it seems, are bound to the rule that no water is allowed to splash in the corridor or the stair-case (?). So, either I would get a basin with water, inside which I would stand and wash my feet there, or I would get a bucket with water. In the case of bucket, I would first wash one foot in the bucket, put it on the towel, and while standing with that foot on the towel, I put the other foot in the bucket, wash it there, and then placing it on the towel too, I rubbed dry both feet together. The bucket was narrow and I had to be careful not to fall.

5. Accommodation

For a monk who is faithful to the *Vinaya* rules, it will not be possible to lie down under the same roof with a woman or a sizeable (i.e. dog, cat, etc.) female animal. This is not a problem in a Buddhist country, where are monasteries in each region, and a monk can easily stay there. In the West this is a problem, because there the monasteries are often so far from the place where the monk was invited, that it simply makes no sense to keep the monk there. Or the monastery is not acquainted with the person who invited the monk, or they simply (for whatever reason) don't want to allow the monk to stay for a night there. This made most of my visits in Europe very unexpectedly complicated. Hotels and blocks of flats can never be accepted, because there might be an apartment with a woman – under the same roof – and that woman will certainly lie down at night when the monk is also lying down, even if that were in a different apartment.

One solution is to take a tent. So my dear Australian supporters donated me a superb tent with a camping mat and a large sleeping bag, and I carried it with me throughout Europe. This works if there is a garden or a large balcony, where the tent would fit. However, many people have neither of the two, and then there are serious troubles. Of course, if they do not have some good friends with a garden or balcony, there usually remained only one solution – don't lie down. There were cases when I stayed in an apartment of a block of flats, and there would be just men in the apartment, but I still didn't lie down, because I was sure there could be a woman in a different apartment. So at night I would sit in a sitting position on the ground, and lay my head and hands on a chair right in front of me. This way I was "sitting", but I could rest as well. Not particularly comfortable, but the rule was followed, and the body got some rest.

There are two great exceptions for lying down under the same roof where a woman lies down:

1. If there are two houses connected by the same wall, but without any door or way how the woman could come from one house to the other without going outside, then the house where no woman is would be allowed – because the woman cannot access the house where the monk is lying down from inside, she would have to go outside and then come in. The point here is, that somebody staying outside could see the woman as coming to the monk's house and the woman then could not blame the monk, that it was the monk who accessed her. (And I believe that this rule is made especially to *help* prevent women from abusing monks of having sex with them whenever they are angry with the monk.)

2. The second exception is somewhat desperate, because it might not be well understood by those who think logically. It says, that if the monk came to the house by one entrance, then if the woman came by a different entrance, they could lie down together. I suppose this is based on certain architectural features of ancient Indians, where perhaps the same house had different portions, each accessible from different doors and not connected. I believe this could be the case of ground-floor-only houses that accommodated more families.

The first exception was very handy in Prague, where a supportive lady found for me a boxing-gym, one-storeyed construction connected to blocks-of-flats on each side, but not accessible other way than from outside. While there, I even met the gentleman who cleaned the gym in the morning, and taught him how to meditate ... he asked for it!

There is also one more exception, that if one of the walls is missing, or if the roof is missing, or if part of the wall and part of the roof (at the same time) are missing, then it is also alright to lie down there at the time when a woman lies down. There was such need in UK, where we were really desperate to find any place at all. I was accommodated in a hotel with balcony, where the balcony had only a wired-like fence. The roof was complete, but the fence didn't count (it was not a "wall"), hence I could sleep on the balcony. However, the hotel was right at the ocean's shore, and the temperature on the balcony at night was freezing cold. So I stayed inside, not lying down...



See the balcony in the first floor of the hotel – it is not a "wall", because one can see through it.



There was enough space on the balcony for a camping-mat and sleeping bag.



But being right at the ocean's shore, the nights were too cold.

In one case I was invited to a large house of a family of husband, wife, and three children (all boys). The lady and their dear female dog learned about my rules and willingly left each night to sleep in their other house nearby. They returned in the morning. However, I brought with me my habit to take rest at noon – and didn't realize, that the lovely dog does the same. So I happened to lie down at the same time under the same roof as their dear doggy, and thus I (unknowingly) incurred a minor offence.

6. Bhikkhunīs

Of course, there is no *bhikkhunī* in the world, they all died out centuries ago. Of course..

But you know, "they didn't know that it's impossible, so they did it", is the famous ridicule by Mark Twain. So, for us monks, who are really strict, we will not dare to break a rule with a *bhikkhunī* thinking "she's not a *bhikkhunī*". She was ordained by *Theravāda* monks! What if she is a true *Theravāda bhikkhunī*?! And that's where the problem starts. The problem is not that "she is a *bhikkhunī*". The problem is that "she *might* be a *bhikkhunī*". In that case, for me who knows that the rules for conduct with lay-women and *bhikkhunīs* are contradicting one another, I run into a number of problems. For example, if I want to give a piece of clothes to a lay-woman, I can give it to her, but it must be given as a gift only, never in exchange for anything. However, if I want to give something to a *bhikkhunī*, it must be only by exchange for something (anything), never as a gift. So, if I think that she is a lay-woman, then I give her a robe, and in case if she were a *bhikkhunī*, I fall into offence of giving something to a *bhikkhunī* without exchanging it for something. If I think that she is a *bhikkhunī* and give her robes in exchange, then if she is a lay-woman I fall into the

offence of trading/exchanging with a lay-woman. And now I knew that the dear *bhikkhunī* needs robes, and that I want to support her. What could I do?

So, already before I left, I contacted my dear supporter in Myanmar, thinking "I will introduce the *bhikkhunī* to my supporter, and see what will happen." So I wrote to my supporter – "Supporter, did you know that there is a Czech bhikkhuni in Czech Republic?" And immediately after that he replied: "What does she need? What can I donate for her?" This way I was entirely freed from the *Vinaya* problem, because at that point whatever I would suggest or say, it was "donation" of the lay supporter, not of me. So my supporter purchased ten sets of upper- and under- robes, as well as ten double-robes in Shwe Oo Min Tawya, and I then carried that large parcel with me to Australia. From Australia my dear Australian supporter shipped the package to Czech Republic. There in Prague's airport me and my dear sister took that package to Pilsen, and then from Pilsen me and my dear student from Germany transported it by car all the way to Prostějov, the town where our dear Czech *bhikkhunī* resides. The parcel was handed over to the *bhikkhunī* by hands of my dear student, so there was no doubt, no problem.

I heard that some monks do not appreciate sitting on the same platform (or stage) together with *bhikkhunīs*, but this is coming culturally, there is no *Vinaya* rule against same platform/stage. A different case would be with a same couch or seat, because the monk can then come into weird contact with the *bhikkhunī*, and then suffer the *bhikkhunī's* blame of harrassing her (even if it were not true). A special exception created by smart Burmese monks is, that the monk sits on his sitting cloth, and understands his sitting cloth as a "separate" seat – that way a monk can sit on the same seat as a woman or *bhikkhunī*. But this is only for critical cases where no other solution is found.

Another issue I had to be careful about was the meal. I was invited for a meal in the *bhikkhunī* monastery (i.e. nunnery) in Czech Republic, but I had to make sure that the meal is not suggested or arranged by the *bhikkhunīs*, that the *bhikkhunīs* did not influence the lay people in any way to offer me meal. So I made a plan to have meal elsewhere and visit the nunnery only for the meeting of the Czech Buddhists. The lady responsible for organization of the monastery persuaded me that it is their own intention to donate me meal, and that I certainly should accept their invitation. I therefore gave up my previous plan and accepted their invitation. From that point onward it was pure. Any time after that, even if the *bhikkhunīs* said or suggested anything, it would be alright – because the exception to the rule is that the *bhikkhunīs* can arrange or organize the meal for the monk(s) if the meal-invitation was previously planned by the lay people themselves.

7. Women

For the celibate monks women are the greatest challenge in the West, whether they like it or not. I have heard such stories about monks and women in the West, that most of the readers of this text would perhaps lose all their faith in monks if they had to read them. But obviously, all those monks were not among the strictest, and it is the "strict *Vinaya*" that protects a monk from a serious failure, not a loser's *Vinaya*.

In four of the five countries in Europe I was hosted by women, and in many circumstances I was entirely alone with those women. The strictest *Vinaya* allowed me to survive all those encounters without a single problem. And most difficult circumstances are those when the monk is with a woman alone, so those cases have to be well understood in terms of *Vinaya*. A monk is not allowed to speak with a woman if they both sit or one of them lies down (obviously, they won't lie down together, as explained above). If a monk wants to speak with a woman while both are sitting, it is necessary to have about twenty meters free space in (at least) one direction, so that anybody who would come to that range would either hear them or see them. So, whenever I would interview a lady about meditation or Dhamma, and we were alone, we would either sit outside in the open, or we opened the window or the door. If the window or door was not open and the woman would sit in the same place as me, I would simply "think about something else", which is yet another exception. So to summarize:

1. If one of the two (monk and woman) stands, it is alright for them to talk.
2. If both of them sit, in any direction there must be free space for anybody to come and hear/see them.
3. If both of them sit and door or window is not open, they must not speak.

Of course, when these exceptions are used daily, there will be a case or more when it gets out of control. Once I interviewed a lady in a room while another lady was present little bit afar. Then the lady left the room and closed the door. I however continued talking, because I didn't notice that the door was closed. At that moment I had the offence...

Ven. Ṭhānissaro in his magnificent "Buddhist Monastic Code" suggests, that if there is "no lust", it is also no offence. My *Vinaya* mentor ven. Vajirapāṇibhivaṃsa, who has memorized all of the five books of *Vinaya Piṭaka* and carefully studied all its Commentaries and Sub-Commentaries however doesn't agree with that.

An interesting solution for travelling by car was known to me already from Myanmar – because the windows of the car are transparent (at least of the cars I went by), it is alright to go with a woman alone without anybody else on board, because there are people from around (i.e. from other cars on the road) who can see us. It was more challenging at night, when one of us had to keep a car-window opened so that others could "hear" us.

I had to make use of a large number of *Vinaya* exceptions when I was in the vicinity of women. Another such rule is related to travelling with a woman. Monk is not allowed to travel with a woman, unless the woman herself entirely organized the trip, or unless the woman came to the place where the monk naturally stays (I suppose "slept" is the safest interpretation of "stay") and takes him on the journey. So, several times I arrived to a country by airplane, and to my surprise I found out that a single woman (without anybody accompanying her) is waiting for me at the airport's meeting point. Neither did I organize whatever would be happening after that, nor was I aware that one woman alone will come for me. Because I didn't organize what was to happen next, there was no offence. Because I didn't say "so let's go", that was yet another reason why I had no offence. The ladies simply told me to come here or go there, and I would at best ask what's going to happen next, following all the instructions. Then, when I arrived to the Myanmar

airport (at the end of the tour), to my great surprise, I was awaited by a single Burmese lady (so it's not only in the West!). And to make it even more funny, the lady didn't know in what monastery I live. So as we got on the car, she asked me "so, where would you like to go?" And I just answered: "Well, because you came for me alone, I cannot tell you anything about where to go. This is a *Vinaya* rule which prevents monks from going on a date with a lady." As a Burmese lady she fully understood, and arranged for me transport with somebody else. In fact, formerly the plan was that she is coming together with my Burmese supporter. My supporter could not come, so he sent his friends instead. At the time when I was leaving the airport those gentlemen were drinking coffee in a coffee bar nearby. The lady also didn't notice them. Then after several phone-calls the problem was solved.

8. Teaching *Dhamma*

Teaching *Dhamma* was the very purpose of my visiting Europe. Although I did make use of the journey to get my new passport as well, this could be well done in Australia. The *Vinaya* problems that I faced during Teaching *Dhamma* were minor, but I had to develop a way how to "make them minor", otherwise they could make things very unpleasant.

1. It is necessary that the audience take off their shoes and socks if they want to listen to the deep Dhamma. This was possible only after a careful explanation. I explained, that when people attend an important meeting, or at school, they are supposed to remove their caps and hats. Such is the culture in Czech Republic, and it is known in other Western countries as well. Interestingly, removing caps and hats is required if a monk is going to explain deep Dhamma to the audience. Then I just used that as an example for the other rule, and that is removing shoes and socks – "this tradition didn't arrive to the West, however it is the rule of the Buddha, given to monks in order to maintain respect for His teachings. Monks are not allowed to teach Dhamma to those who exhibit a superior situation." In most cases this worked like a charm. In one case I told this to a university professor, and I forgot that sickness is an exception. Anyway, he asked "and should all of the audience remove the shoes and socks?" And I said "only those who I talk to, not all." So he asked his graduate students and the others to take them off, saying he himself won't do that. Then when he asked me a question, I answered it "to those who removed their shoes and socks". After two hours of the hot debate, also little bit confused by those who gradually left and took back their shoes and socks, I became too concentrated on the topic that I didn't realize that all of the people present put back on their shoes and socks. Interestingly, when I realized it the debate was over (so I didn't have to make another ultimatum...) The reason why the people really remove their shoes and socks usually is because I patiently wait with that request and a Dhamma talk until they themselves ask me a question that they really want to get answered.

2. Hugging knees (*hatthapallatthikāya*) is an interesting rule for teaching Dhamma. The way of sitting when the person is pointing both their feet at the monk and keeping knees close to their chest, hugging both the knees by both hands – this is the explanation of *hatthapallatthikā* by the famous master ven. Janakābhivamsa. Unfortunately, this position is the traditional position of Australian audience if they sit on the floor, so I had to face a serious controversion. Traditionally in Asia, lay people (and monks as well) are not supposed to point their feet at the one who is teaching Dhamma in any way, even if they keep their legs straight. But I am not aware of any such rule in *Vinaya*. The only rule similar to that tradition is the one about hugging knees. Also, if I saw that somebody in the audience hug only one knee, or hug the knees only by one hand, I took it as exempt from the rule.

3. Teaching Dhamma in the car was yet another challenge. A monk is not allowed to teach Dhamma to somebody who "goes" (*gacchanto*) in front, so if driving car or going by car is "going", then a monk who is sitting at the back-seat should not teach somebody sitting in the front-seat. So I remember being requested to sit in the front seat in order that I can teach Dhamma while going by the car. Note, that if the audience is next to you, your seat should not be pulled back, to avoid yourself sitting "behind" the audience. This is however just one of three things to do. Another one is about removing shoes and socks. This was a hard nut for a number of drivers, but after some time they themselves decided they didn't want to wait until we get out of the car, and removed their shoes and socks even for the driving time. Finally, something I have realized just now and not before, there is another rule for teaching Dhamma – "I will not teach Dhamma while walking beside the path to one walking on the path." Certainly, this would not be the case in a car, unless the driver drives the monk's portion of the car off into the ditch...

9. Sight-Seeing

From the very beginning I avoided sight-seeing without a particular purpose. The purpose number one is education, so if I was asked where to go sight-seeing by my hosts, I would always select something where I could learn something interesting, from history, culture, or the biosphere. This way I have visited museums, galleries, zoos, and botanical gardens in different countries, benefitting thus not only myself, but of course my hosts as well – who often times visited those places for the first time in their life.

The problem was only one – the habit. Being so much used to the invitations to visit different museums etc., it would be so strange to me if I wasn't invited anywhere. Then, if I was asked to choose where to go, sometimes I wasn't able to select something achievable in terms of transport or time. So, sometimes I wonder whether it's better not to select anything, and stay motionless and speechless until the host either selects themselves or cancels the sight-seeing completely. Nevertheless, all my sight-seeing trips were very inspiring, educational, and I have brilliant memories of them.

10. Confession of transgressions

Sometimes even to the strictest monks a rule here and there slips out of their attention, and that is perfectly good. In fact, even Arahants may break a rule here and there *unintentionally*. So, if it is unintentional, there is nothing to worry about, and I myself didn't. This made my living possible, and in fact also comfortable. I just did as much as I could, and what didn't turn out well I learned from it and devised a solution. According to the *Kosambakavatthu* of the *Dhammapada* verse 6 commentary, it seems that it is alright to wait for confession (the purification ritual done together with a fellow monk) until the full-moon day or the new-moon day. In my case, when I was most of the time the only monk in the area of three-hundred kilometers or more, it was important that I avoided as many rules as possible to keep my mind clear, and if there was an offence, to visit a monk or a monastery on the day of *uposatha*, i.e. the full-moon day or the new-moon day. I remember travelling several hundred kilometers off the track when going from France to Czech Republic by car, just because I wanted to do my confession with a monk in a monastery in Germany. The off-track distance was however not that bad, and I had visited that monastery two weeks before that. The purification went smoothly.

I was also "lucky" to forget the full-moon days and new-moon days, so if that happened I avoided all *uposatha* ritual without any offence (the offence is committed only if the *uposatha* ritual is not done despite being aware of the full/new-moon day). *Upasatha* ritual for a lone monk is fairly simple – he must sweep the place where any monks could potentially come and sit, prepare water for washing feet (in a bucket), prepare water for drinking (a glass of water), prepare a seat for a monk who could potentially come, light a candle,

and then, while squatting, recite "today is *Upasatha* for me". That's it. Yup, nothing else. I did this only one time, when I was in France, and at that time my dear host most kindly supported me in the ritual.



This "*adhiṭṭhānuposatha*" doesn't include reciting any rules of monks, so I supposed it was alright that lay people were close by. (Photo courtesy by Mrs. E.)

Of course, the number of rules mentioned above will barely come up to one hundred, so what to say about ninety billion. However, I believe that those I had to be particularly careful about were only those mentioned above, none other. All other were same like in Myanmar, e.g. no matchmaking, no masturbation, no touching women, speaking only truth, speaking politely, no eating after noon, no playing games, no playing musical instruments, no storing food over-night (indeed, there is no exception for travelling), announcing my departure to a monk if there is a monk present in the monastery (if I stayed in one), not exceeding certain distance from any piece of furniture if I myself removed it or if I asked somebody else to remove it from building,⁶ etc. etc. These are exactly same as in Myanmar or elsewhere, and I didn't find any difficulty following them.

May all beings be happy and healthy ☺

monk Saraṇa

⁶ I wrongly remembered, that it is maximum to the distance of hand-reach (*hatthapāsa*). In fact, it is to the distance of middle-sized man's stone-throw (*majjhimaṣṣa purisassa leḍḍupātaṃ*). I sometimes removed a chair outside from the building to do interview with my students under the open sky, in the village (to avoid speaking with them alone in a room). Also, even if the furniture is not Saṅgha property, if it is property of lay-people, it is still a minor offence. It would be no offence if it is in the personal ownership of the monk himself.